

A Choice Set Modeling Approach to EU Issue Voting

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Abstract

Focusing on the case of Britain, this paper evaluates the role that EU issue voting played in the 1992 and 1997 elections. EU issue voting arises when the issue of European integration has a direct influence on vote choice by influencing the attractiveness of party alternatives. In this paper, we explore two different ways in which such influence can occur: elimination of party alternatives due to their EU stance or moderator of the utility felt toward a subset of party alternatives that are all viable for the voter. These two influences are explored through a choice set logistic regression model. The results suggest that EU issue voting increased from 1992 to 1997, especially in England. However, compared with traditional left-right issues, the influence of EU issue voting remained modest even in 1997, when public opinion had taken a Euroskeptic turn and when the Conservative party was seen as much closer than Labour on this issue.

Introduction

A growing body of literature is concerned with the role of the European Union in national elections. As an issue, European integration has been referred to as a “sleeping giant” (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). While potentially of great importance, European integration has so far had relatively minor electoral consequences. But contemporary research suggests the giant may be awakening. Declining support for European integration, its growing salience as an issue, and the rise of explicitly Euroskeptic parties all contribute to the growing potential for EU issue voting.

Britain is one place where this transformation can be observed. In the period between the 1992 and 1997 elections for the House of Commons, two things happened. First, the British public became more Euroskeptic (Evans, 1998, 1999, 2001). Second, the conservative party grew more Euroskeptic, increasing its distance from the Labour party on European integration, and increasing this issue’s salience (Evans, 1998). The potential for EU issue voting thus rose considerably, even though Evans (2001) concludes that this potential remained unrealized by 1996.

As researchers begin to consider EU issue voting, several questions remain about the precise role of this issue. Is the EU a primary decision criterion, i.e., one that voters use to eliminate parties from their consideration? Or is it a secondary decision criterion, something that is applied to make a final choice but is not used to screen parties? The answers to these questions are of considerable importance because they result in a different appreciation of the potency of EU issue voting. To the extent that parties are eliminated based on their EU stance, the issue is more potent than when it serves as one of several criteria that allow voters to make a final choice among parties that are all reasonable choices for them.

This paper is a first effort to answer the question of how the EU enters voters decision calculus. Using the British elections of 1992 and 1997 as our “laboratory,” we ask if and how EU issue voting influenced voting behavior. Our analytic vehicle is a choice set logistic regression model that allows us to explore whether the EU was a primary or secondary consideration in shaping vote choice in Britain.

EU Issue Voting: The Story So Far

An expanding body of research indicates that European matters play a role in national politics, particularly in national electoral politics. Rising salience

and conflict regarding the EU in the post-Maastricht era have resulted in what some scholars term a “constraining dissensus,” whereby European citizens and political parties alike actively monitor the course of integration and where necessary voice their fears and objections (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Indeed, there is ample evidence of the growing politicization of the EU in domestic politics. The large body of research on citizen support for European integration in both Western and Eastern Europe points to perceptions of economic benefit and social identity as factors influencing public opinion (e.g., Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2002; Carey, 2002; Tucker et al., 2002; Elgün and Tillman, 2007). Moreover, political parties are no longer turning a blind eye to European publics on such matters, but are instead taking increasingly open and distinguishable positions on European integration that are at least minimally responsive to citizens attitudes (Carrubba, 2001; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Often this has come at a high price for political parties, as intra-party dissent over European integration has become manifest in party systems throughout Europe (Edwards, 2008). Taken together, this suggests the development of a range of structured public opinion and differentiated party positions on European integration, leading Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) to describe the EU issue as a “sleeping giant” in electoral politics.

The influence of EU issues on domestic electoral politics can occur through a number of ways. It can take place indirectly, either through the influence of European Parliamentary elections on national voting behavior (e.g. Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk et al., 1996; Marsh 1998) or through the impact of European integration on economic voting in national elections (e.g. Scheve, 1999; Bohrer and Tan 2000; Tillman, 2008). But it also can occur directly through a mechanism referred to as EU issue voting. EU issue voting is the process whereby individual preferences over European integration influence vote choices in national elections (Tillman, 2004; De Vries, 2007).

The first study into the extent of EU issue voting was conducted in the context of the British elections by Geoffrey Evans (1998, 1999, 2001). Evans’ work demonstrated for the first time that EU attitudes could matter in national elections. Although the effect of EU issue voting on the results of the 1997 and 2001 elections to the House of Commons may not have been decisive, Evans’ work demonstrates that two factors increased the extent and importance the EU issue in British politics: First, the British public became more Euroskeptic. Second, the Conservatives grew increasingly Euroskeptic thus moving closer to the British median voter. Although the Tories were not able to reap the electoral benefit due to a high level of internal dissent on the issue (Evans, 1998), the sleeping giant was stirring in the 1997 and 2001 British elections.

In keeping with Evans' work, recent studies also provide evidence of EU issue voting. This research shows that the degree to which voters' positions on European matters influence their vote choice varies cross-nationally depending on the level of EU issue salience among the electorate, the choices offered by political parties regarding European issues as well as specific EU events such as an EU Treaty referendum or (Turkish) accession. In his examination of Austria, Finland, and Sweden, for example, Tillman (2004) finds evidence of EU issue voting at the time of accession, a period in which EU membership can be assumed to have been salient and at least somewhat divisive. Similarly, De Vries (2007) finds evidence of EU issue voting in Denmark and the United Kingdom, two countries characterized by high levels of partisan conflict over Europe, yet fails to find such evidence in Germany or the Netherlands, where partisan conflict over the EU is far more limited. Looking at the 2005 German elections, Schoen (2008) argues that attitudes towards Turkey's potential accession to the EU played an important role, with voters being more likely to support parties that held closer positions to their own on the Turkish question. Taken together, these findings suggest that European issues can influence domestic elections in situations where there are significant elite and public disagreements over European integration. Finally, in a recent study De Vries (2009) highlights the importance of EU referenda for the development of EU issue voting. By means of a quasi-experiment which compares two Dutch elections (one before and one after the EU referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005), she demonstrates that the EU referendum induced EU issue voting in Dutch elections by raising the degree of party conflict as well as voter salience regarding Europe. However, these EU effects in the 2006 parliamentary elections are relatively modest. European integration is still merely of secondary concern to Dutch voters, though the EU referendum did bring the issue closer to home.

Despite the fact that scholars have focused on the extent and the effects EU issue voting within the national political arena for almost a decade now, we have very limited insight into the exact process by which EU attitudes play a role in voters' choices at the national ballot box. Several key questions remain. For example, is the EU a primary decision criterion, i.e., one that voters use to eliminate parties from their consideration? Or is it a secondary decision criterion, something that is applied to make a final choice but is not used to screen parties? The answers to these questions are of crucial importance as they allow us to judge the extent to which EU attitudes really matter. By conceptualizing EU issue voting as a two-stage process in which voters first narrow down the number of options presented to them on

the ballot by filtering out those that are viable (the consideration stage) and second utilize additional information to choose among the alternatives within the consideration set (the choice stage) leads to a different and more balanced appreciation of the potency of EU issue voting. To the extent that parties are eliminated based on their EU stance, the issue is more potent than when it serves as one of several criteria that allow voters to make a final choice among parties that are all reasonable choices for them.

Considerations and Choices: The Development of EU Issue Voting

Complex societies produce diverse conflicts over public policy. Indeed, the number of potential policy issues that voters can consider when casting their ballot is almost infinite. This raises the question under which conditions can we expect relatively (new) policy issues, like European integration, to influence voting behavior? This issue has been addressed by several prominent scholars within political science (Campbell, et al., 1960; Schattschneider, 1960; Riker, 1982; Sundquist, 1983; Carmines and Stimson, 1986, 1989; Franklin, et al., 1992; Stimson, 2004). A large array of factors, such as critical events or new party entry, are viewed as important pieces of the puzzle concerning why some issues influence voters' voting decisions while others do not.

In this study, we change our focus to the decision process that voters use when making up their minds. Sometimes new issues arise which are explosive in nature. In terms of choice behavior, these become primary decision criteria, competing with old criteria. For example, until the 1850s traditional agrarian-commercial cleavages dominated American politics, favoring Democrats in the South and West and Republicans in the North. However, gradually the issue of slavery had inserted itself into the political debate, creating cracks in particular within the Democratic camp. By 1860, the issue had become so divisive as to produce an outright realignment and, of course, the Civil War. It had become clear that, especially in the South, slavery had become the primary criterion by which politics was judged. At other times, issue evolution is more glacial. Perhaps an issue becomes a secondary decision criterion first, i.e., the issue serves as a criterion by which voters choose among viable options. Eventually, the issue may move toward being the primary criterion, at which time it decides if alternatives are even worth considering. This seems to be the case for abortion in the U.S. context for example (Adams, 1997).

Traditional models of issue evolution focus mainly on the first instance,

i.e. a situation in which new issues become the primary decision criteria, competing with or even replacing the old criteria (Carmines and Stimson, 1986, 1989). The term issue evolution refers to the emergence and development of issues that invoke public interest, which under the condition of long-lasting divisiveness will eventually alter the link between voters and parties and lead to mass (re-) alignment (Carmines and Stimson, 1989: 11).

The model proposed by Carmines and Stimson (1986) is intrinsically top-down, i.e. it is derived from the assumption that party elites set in the process of political change, which will eventually result in mass (re-)alignment. Moreover, it develops a sequence in which elite stances on an issue may result in mass realignment. The first step is the (re-) phrasing of a contentious issue in partisan terms. Vote-seeking, that is the maximization of votes, constitutes the overriding objective of political parties (Downs, 1957). Hence, political parties may have an incentive to introduce or promote an issue within electoral competition, if they feel that this could result in an increase of votes or eventually upset an existing majority. In this respect, the authors also stress the importance of critical moments (Carmines and Stimson, 1986: 902). External developments (i.e. outside of the control of political parties) may draw attention to particular issues. Importantly, in a second step voters must be aware of the differences in the position of the parties on the new issue. This is what Carmines and Stimson (1986: 902-903) refer to as clarity. Following the elite reorientations on contentious issues, the mass public must take on the cues of party elites and form clear preferences on this issue. The clarity of party preferences is not sufficient, however: the new issue must evoke an emotional response among citizens. Hence, the third step highlights the fact that voters must also care about this issue. This is labeled as affect in the model by Carmines and Stimson (1986: 902-903). When these conditions are met, increased polarization of issue attitudes will occur and the issue will eventually change mass identification as the new issue becomes the primary decision criteria, competing or even replacing old criteria (Carmines and Stimson, 1986: 902-903). The final outcome of this process is a realignment of the party system and electorate.

These kind of explosive issues that bring out realignment are most likely the outliers within the population of all political issues. Most political issues may impact political competition and voters decisions, but do so more gradually. As such an extension of the issue evolution model to also include gradual changes is in order. This study attempts to tackle the issue of gradual evolution by focusing on the different ways in which new issues may play out in voters' decisions.

Traditional models of voting behavior often assume (implicitly or explicitly) that voters consider all of the available alternatives. In keeping with research in economics and consumer research (e.g. Manski 1977; Wright and Barbour 1977) and psychology (Tversky 1979), we view voters choices in elections as a two-stage process consisting of a consideration and a choice stage. In the consideration stage voters screen parties based on general information heuristics (such as class or partisanship) and eliminate alternatives. In this first stage, then, voters narrow down the number of options presented to them on the ballot by filtering out those that are viable. In a second and final stage, voters utilize additional information to choose among the alternatives enclosed in the consideration set, should there still be more than one alternative left. This second stage is labeled the choice stage.

The distinction between the consideration and choice stages matters for issue evolution in the following way. Since most issues of all potential political concerns are not likely to be realigning in nature, we may expect the majority of new issues to impact elections and vote choice more gradually. We coin this process gradual issue evolution. In the case of gradual issue evolution, an issue starts a secondary decision criterion. That is, the issue influences the choice stage but not the consideration stage. Put differently, the issue is not (yet) of such great importance that it is used to eliminate alternatives. Over time, such an issue may become a primary decision criterion, i.e., a screening mechanism to remove alternatives from consideration. If issue evolution is more abrupt or radical, of course, the issue will start as a primary decision criterion. As the issue loses importance, it might become of secondary importance or lose influence completely. Figure 1 depicts the connection between issue evolution and choice.

When studying the electoral change, we argue that the first question any author needs to address is the following: Is the issue a primary decision criterion, i.e., one that voters use to eliminate parties from their consideration or is it a secondary decision criterion, something that is applied to make a final choice but is not used to screen parties? One can think of radical issue evolution by means of a Litmus test. When voters use an issue as a means to screen parties, parties have to pass on this issue in order to become considered by voters, much like candidate judges for the Supreme Court who screened on their views regarding abortion or (strict) constitutionalism before they become official nominees.

This study applies these ideas to EU issue voting. Previous work in this area conceives of EU issue voting solely in terms of the choice stage. It is likely that this may have lead to an underestimation of the importance of EU

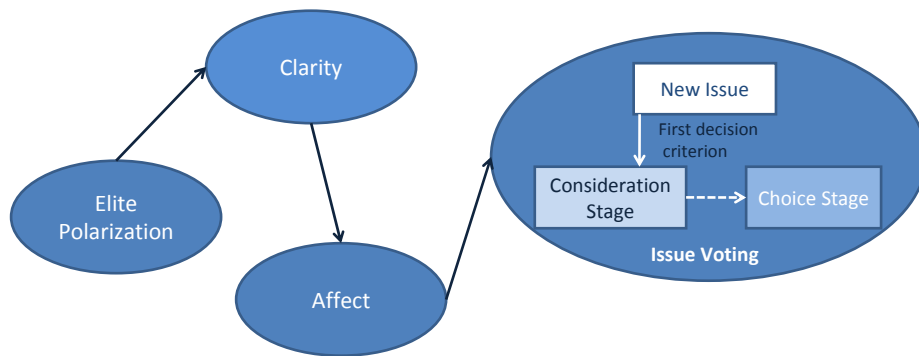


Figure 1: Issue Evolution and Electoral Decision-Making

issue voting for national politics. When voters use the EU issue as a means to screen parties, the effect of the EU issue on national politics may be considerable, while when it serves as one of several criteria that allow voters to make a final choice among parties that are all reasonable choices for them the impact of the EU issue is likely less strong. When parties' EU stances first have to pass a Litmus test, we may actually be witnessing a process of radical issue evolution which could over time bring about changes in the underlying structures of party and electoral competition and mass electoral behavior.

Choice Set Logistic Regression

How does one distinguish between primary and secondary decision making in a choice model? To do so, one needs to formulate a fundamentally different type of model than is commonly used in political science. Conventional choice models, including conditional logit and multinomial probit, implicitly assume that decision makers consider all of the available alternatives. In these models, there is no possibility of distinguishing between primary and secondary decision criteria. These models, then, will not work to answer the questions we ask.

Choice set logistic regression (CSLR) is a model that allows us to distinguish between consideration and choice stages and thus allows us to estimate the impact of the EU in each stage. The model estimates both the probability of including an alternative in the choice set and, given a particular choice set, the conditional probability of selecting the alternative. No data about choice sets need to be elicited. It is sufficient to have data about the final choices that decision makers make.

To formalize the model, let M be the universe of alternatives, in our case political parties; assume there are m such alternatives. Let $C \subseteq M$ be a particular choice set, where we exclude the empty choice set. We can construct $2^m - 1$ such choice sets, which can be collected into the power set G . Let $\pi_q(C)$ be the probability that voter q chooses choice set C ; we call this the choice set probability. This probability reflects the decision process in the consideration stage. Further, let $\pi_q(i|C)$ be the probability of choosing alternative i from choice set C ; we call this the conditional choice probability. This probability reflects the decision process of the choice stage. Then, the unconditional probability of choosing alternative i , i.e., $\pi_q(i)$, follows straightforwardly from the laws of probability:

$$\pi_q(i) = \sum_{C \in G} \pi_q(i|C) \pi_q(C) \quad (1)$$

(Manski 1977). It is now a matter of formulating decision models for each of the decision stages to work out the unconditional choice probabilities on the left-hand side of (1).

Consideration Stage

The consideration stage can be thought of in terms of screening of the alternatives. Let z_{qi} be a vector of screening rules. Further, let $z'_{qi}\gamma$ be the weighted sum of these screening rules. Then an alternative i is included into the choice set if

$$z'_{qi}\gamma + \delta_{qi} > \alpha_i \quad (2)$$

Here δ_{qi} is a stochastic component, consisting of unobserved factors that may influence the appeal of a particular alternative. The parameter α_i is an acceptability threshold: the overall appeal of the alternative has to exceed this threshold before it is included into the choice set.

One way in which the EU can influence vote choice is through the screening mechanism. Including the distance between a voter and the parties on the EU in z_{qi} , one obtains a model in which alternatives are at least partially screened on their EU stance. Note that in our setup, the EU stance could be compensated for by other elements of z_{qi} . Nevertheless, too discrepant an EU stance could lead to disqualification of a party by the voter.

We now turn (2) into an inclusion probability by making the assumption that the δ_{qi} are independently, standard logistic distributed. It then follows that the inclusion probability for an alternative is given by

$$\omega_{qi} = \frac{1}{1 + \exp(\alpha_i - z'_{qi}\gamma)} \quad (3)$$

Equation (3) specifies a regular logit model for each alternative in M .

The choice set probabilities are now easily constructed. Given the independence assumption on δ_{qi} , it follows that

$$\pi_q(C) = \frac{\prod_{i \in C} \omega_{qi} \prod_{j \notin C} (1 - \omega_{qj})}{1 - \Pr(\text{Empty})} \quad (4)$$

The numerator in (4) is the product of the inclusion probabilities of the included alternatives times the product of the exclusion probabilities of the excluded alternatives. The denominator is a normalizing factor to account for the exclusion of the empty choice set.

Choice Stage

In the choice stage, an alternative is selected from the choice set. Here, we assume that voters are utility maximizers and choose the alternative with the highest utility. Thus, alternative i is selected from the choice set if $U_{qi} > U_{qj}$ $\forall j \neq i \in C$. Assuming that utility has a fixed and random component and that the fixed component is a linear function of a vector of attributes, x_{qi} , this can be expressed as:

$$x_{qi}\beta + \epsilon_{qi} > x_{qj}\beta + \epsilon_{qj} \quad (5)$$

$\forall j \neq i \in C$. Here ϵ_{qj} is a random component and β is a parameter vector. Assuming that the random components follow independent Gumbel distributions, we can express the conditional choice probabilities as conditional logit models (McFadden 1974):

$$\pi_q(i|C) = \frac{\exp(x'_{qi}\beta)}{\sum_{j \in C} \exp(x'_{qj}\beta)} \quad (6)$$

Note that $\pi_q(i|C) = 0$ if $i \notin C$ and $\pi_q(i|C) = 1$ if $C = \{i\}$.

Estimation

Estimation of the CSLR is complicated by the fact that the likelihood function is not guaranteed to be strictly log-concave. This problem arises when the parameters in the consideration stage become so large, as to push the inclusion probabilities to essentially one, such that further increasing the parameters doesn't affect the inclusion probability – and hence the likelihood – anymore. Standard optimizers run the risk of landing in a flat region, leading to convergence problems. Note that this is an optimization problem only. The likelihood function has a unique maximum and is locally log-concave around this maximum.

The optimization problem can be resolved in a number of different ways. Here, we opt for incorporating weakly informative Cauchy(0,2.5) priors (Gelman et al. 2008). These priors add very little information and hence, do not bias the results too much (and if they do, it is in a downward direction). However, they stabilize the posterior, rendering it globally strictly log-concave. We then use a standard optimizer, the BFGS algorithm, to approximate the mode of the posterior.

The 1992 and 1997 British Elections

Background

Studying the 1992 and 1997 elections for the House of Commons provides one with a unique opportunity to assess EU issue voting. In 1992, the EU was a minor issue. While British voters were not wildly enthusiastic about the EU, neither were they strong Euroskeptics. And the distance between Labour and the Conservatives on the EU was relatively small (Evans 2001). In all, these conditions were less than favorable for observing EU issue voting in the elections. By 1997, this had all changed. The Conservatives had begun to give considerable weight to the issue. At the same time, the British public had become quite Euroskeptical and was also giving greater weight to the issue. Finally, the Conservatives had moved their position, increasing the distance to Labour and taking a stance much closer to the typical Brit (Evans 2001). In sum, by 1997 the conditions for EU issue voting had become much more favorable.

These shifts can be clearly observed in Figures 2 and 3, which depict mean voter and perceived party positions on the EU in 1992 and 1997 for England and Scotland, respectively. These horizontal scales in these pictures run from pro-European attitudes on the left to anti-European attitudes on the right. It is clear that voters shifted in anti-EU direction from 1992 to 1997. They also perceived that the Conservatives had moved in this direction. If anything, they deemed Labour to be more pro-EU in 1997 than it had been in 1992. Thus, perceived party polarization was a reality by 1997, providing fertile ground for EU issue voting.

At the same time that voter and party positions shifted, so did the perceived importance of the EU. In 1992, 42.6 percent of voters indicated that the EU was (extremely) important for their vote. By 1997, this number had increased to 56 percent. Clearly, issue salience had increased, further adding to the favorable conditions for EU issue voting.

Britain is thus a perfect case for studying EU issue voting over time. On the whole, one would expect to see an increase in EU issue voting moving from 1992 to 1997. An open question is whether this increase manifested itself through using the EU as a primary decision criterion or a secondary decision criterion. That question plays a central role in our analysis, along with the question of how EU issue voting compares with voting on the basis of traditional left-right issues.

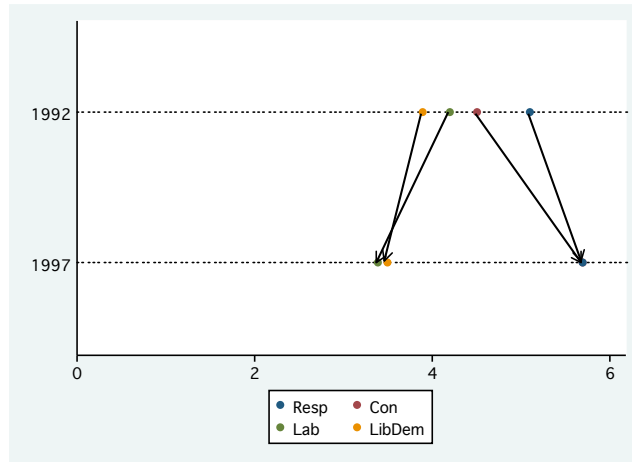


Figure 2: Shifting EU Positions in England 1992-97

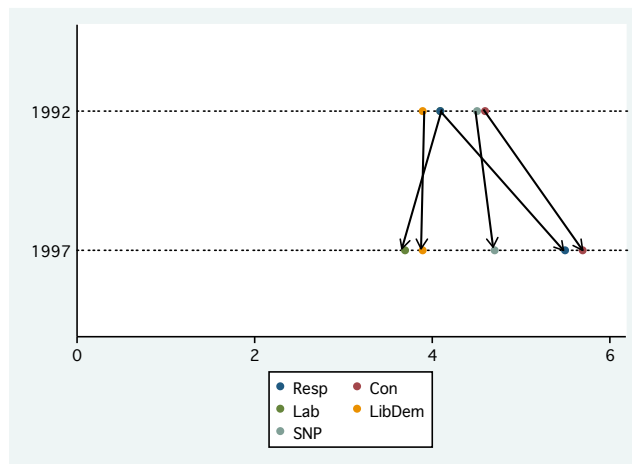


Figure 3: Shifting EU Positions in Scotland 1992-97

Data, Model Specification, and Measures

Data The data for this paper come from the British Election Studies 1992-97 panel survey (Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1998). We separately analyze the data for English and Scottish respondents. For England, we consider vote choice among three alternatives: the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats. For Scotland, we consider a fourth alternative as well: the Scottish National Party (SNP).

Model Specification Our modeling strategy is to estimate three different models of EU issue voting. The first model, includes subjective class indicators in the first stage and the EU, traditional left-right issues, and economic retrospections in the second stage. This model is in keeping with a long literature suggesting the primary role of social class in voting behavior (Butler and Stokes 1969; Evans 1999). This literature suggests that class is a primary decision criterion in British elections, albeit one that may have lost some of its influence over time (Franklin 1985). By contrast, the EU is assumed to be a secondary criterion in the first model. In this model, then, the perceived EU stance of parties is not used to eliminate alternatives. Rather, this stance is used only to choose among a set of acceptable alternatives and only then when the screening stage has left more than one party in the consideration set.

In the second model, we move the EU from the choice to the consideration stage of the CSLR. Here, it competes with class as a screening mechanism. Traditional left-right issues and economic retrospections remain in the second stage. This model allows us to determine to what extent parties were eliminated from further consideration based on their EU stance.

The third model keeps the EU in the choice stage but moves traditional left-right issues to the consideration stage of the CSLR. The purpose of this model is to compare the influence of the EU (Model 2) to traditional left-right issues (Model 3) as a screening mechanism.

The models are identical for England and Scotland, with the following exception. In Scotland, we include an additional screening mechanism: whether a voter desires Scotland to be independent or not. This should be an important screening mechanism, in particular, for the SNP. Consequently, the EU issue competes with both class and nationalism as a screening mechanism in Scotland.

Measures We use two social class indicators: working and middle class. They take on the value one if a voter identifies with the working class or middle class, respectively. The baseline category consists of voters without a subjective class identity.

For Scottish independence, we use on a question concerning the power of the Scottish Assembly. Several response options allude to the desire for independence of Scotland (either insider or outside of the EU). Voters receive a score of one if they expressed such a desire and zero otherwise.

Economic retrospections refer to perceptions of the development of the economy in the previous year. They run from perceptions that the British economy got worse to perceptions that it got better. In general, negative economic perceptions should hurt the incumbent party (the Conservatives in both 1992 and 1997).

Traditional economic left-right issues are captured through four questions about policy priorities. The first concerns whether government should try to get people back to work versus keeping prices down. The second concerns the question of whether spending and taxes should increase versus decrease. The third concerns privatization versus nationalization of businesses. The final issue concerns whether incomes should be made more equal. For each of these issues, we defined the absolute distance between the voter's own position and his/her perception of the party positions. Since all of these issues are clearly economic left-right issues—as is clear from a factor analysis of the self-placements, which yields a clear single factor with that interpretation—we averaged the four distances to obtain a single measure.

Finally, the EU issue is defined in terms of uniting fully with the European Union versus retaining Britain's independence. Here, we defined again the absolute distance between a voter's own placement and that of the political parties (see Figures 2 and 3).

Results

How did the EU issue evolve as a consideration in shaping vote choice in Britain between 1992 and 1997? We answer this question by considering England and Scotland separately. We do so because the pattern of issue evolution seems to have been different in these two countries. In both locations, there is evidence of growing EU issue voting. In England this has taken the form of growing importance of the EU as a primary decision criterion, i.e., a screening mechanism. By contrast, in Scotland the changed importance of the EU seems to have worked its way primarily through a secondary decision criterion.

Table 1: Average Partial Effects of EU (England 1992)

England 92:	Model 1		Model 2	
	max	min	max	min
Conservatives	0.32	0.54	0.45	0.52
Labour	0.17	0.37	0.18	0.37
Liberal Dems	0.08	0.26	0.05	0.21

EU Issue Voting in England 1992-97

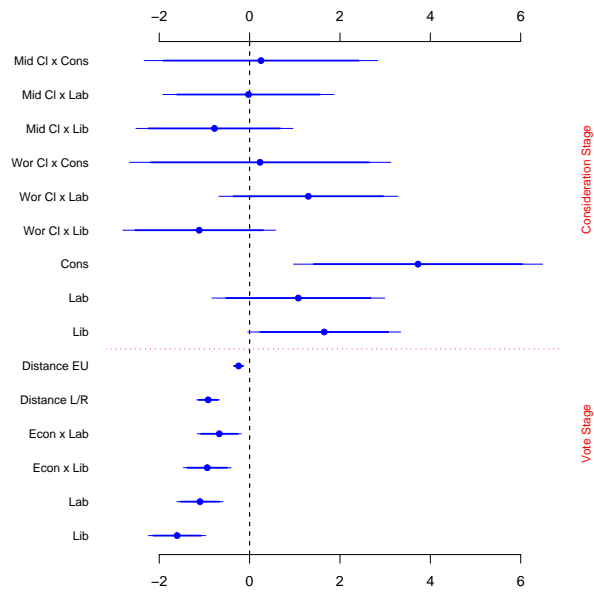
Figure 4 shows the 1992 coefficients for the first and second model specifications, where EU issue voting is conceived of as a secondary versus primary decision criterion. The plot shows the posterior mode, as well as the 95 percent credible intervals. There is evidence of EU issue voting in 1992, both in the form of a screening mechanism and a secondary choice criterion. The EU coefficient for the first model is $-.243$, while it is $-.188$ for the second model.

When translated into average marginal effects, we obtain the results in Table 1. These average partial effects move the EU distance for one party from minimum to maximum while holding everything else at the actual observed values. The entries in Table 1 reflect the average over the observations. Importantly, the effects of EU issue voting are most pronounced when the EU is a secondary consideration. For instance, moving the Conservatives from the maximum to the minimum distance on the EU increase the probability of voting for them by $.22$ points when the EU is a secondary consideration and by $.07$ when the EU is a primary consideration. The results for Labour are similar. Only for the Liberal Democrats does it appear that the EU issue vote mattered about equally as a primary and secondary consideration.

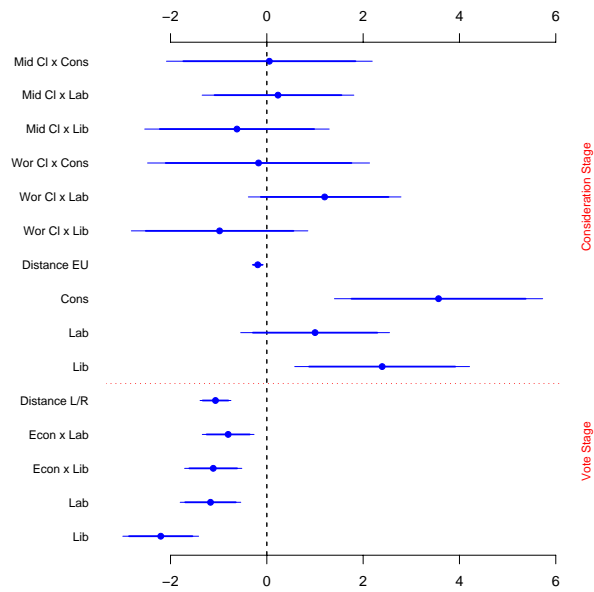
It should be noted that the impact of EU issue voting was relatively minor compared to traditional left-right issues in 1992. In model 1, where the EU and economic left-right compete in the choice stage, the left-right coefficient ($-.918$) is almost four times greater than the EU coefficient ($-.243$).¹ And when left right is considered a screening mechanism, as we do in the third model, then its coefficient ($-.831$) is also considerably larger than that of the EU as screening mechanism. Clearly, EU issue voting was a significant factor in 1992, but of relative lesser importance than economic left-right issues.

¹Note that the coefficients of these two issue dimensions can be directly compared as they are on the same scale.

Figure 4: Posterior Estimates England 1992



(a) Model 1



(b) Model 2

Table 2: Average Partial Effects of EU (England 1997)

England 97:	Model 1		Model 2	
	max	min	max	min
Conservatives	0.20	0.40	0.23	0.36
Labour	0.25	0.53	0.23	0.51
Liberal Dems	0.07	0.26	0.1	0.23

How did this all change in 1997? Figure 5 shows the posteriors for models 1 and 2 in 1997. In the model where the EU enters the choice stage (model 1), we see that the 1997 coefficient is slightly smaller than the 1992 coefficient: -.224 versus -.243. This change is so small as to be of no substantive importance; for all intents and purposes, we can argue that the impact of EU issue voting in the choice stage has remained constant from 1992 to 1997. By contrast, there is clear evidence of the increased importance of the EU as a screening rule. By 1997, the EU coefficient in the second model was -.300 (in contrast to -.188 in 1992). This suggests that English voters started to use the EU to weed out parties.

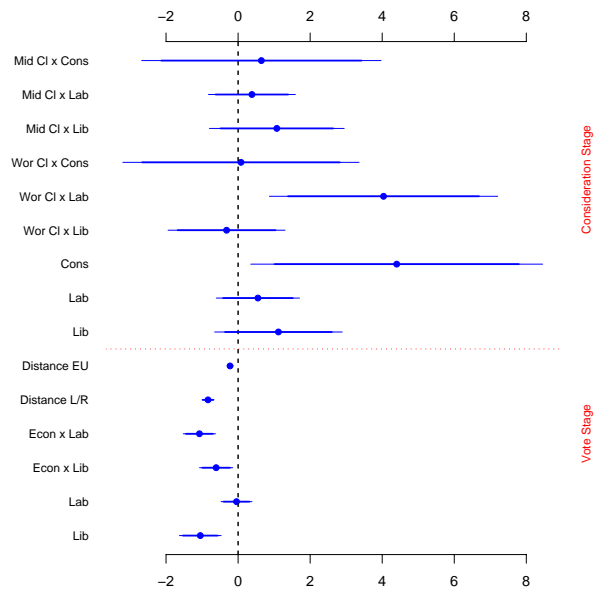
There is clear evidence of this in the average partial effects. As Table 2 shows, changes in EU distance still left a significant mark on the probability of voting for a particular party when the EU served as a secondary consideration. But compared to Table 1, there is now clear evidence of the EU also having strong effects when conceived of as a primary decision criterion. In all, then, there is good evidence for the increased importance of EU issue voting in England by 1997.

Again, the impact of EU issue voting should be contrasted with that of the economic left-right dimension. When this is done for the first model, we see that the EU remained a minor issue compared to economic left-right: the left right coefficient (-.835) continues to be about four times larger than the EU coefficient in 1997 compared to 1992. As a screening mechanism, however, the EU had caught up some with left-right in 1997: the ratio of the EU versus left-right coefficients was -.3 to -.919 in 1997 versus -.188 to -.831 in 1992.

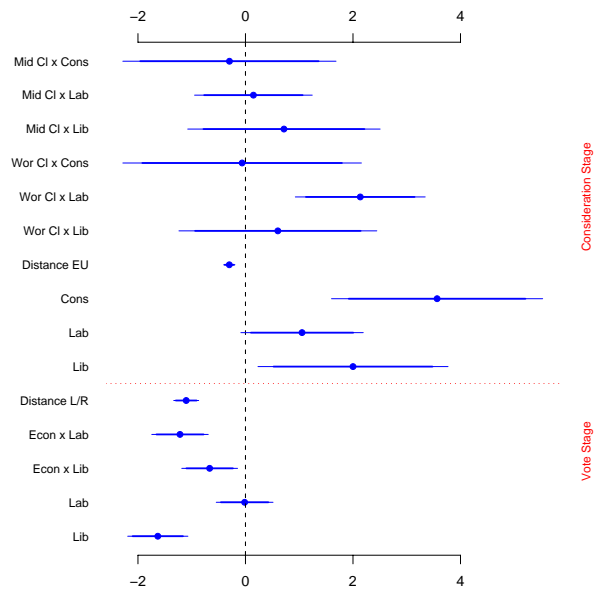
EU Issue Voting in Scotland 1992-97

How did the EU issue evolve in Scottish voting behavior in the period 1992-97? To answer this question, we now include the SNP in the analysis. Additionally,

Figure 5: Posterior Estimates England 1997



(a) Model 1



(b) Model 2

Table 3: Average Partial Effects of EU (Scotland 1992)

Scotland 92:	Model 1		Model 2	
	max	min	max	min
Conservatives	0.16	0.30	0.22	0.27
Labour	0.19	0.39	0.1	0.4
Liberal Dems	0.04	0.14	0.02	0.15
SNP	0.16	0.32	0.13	0.33

we consider the role of Scottish independence in vote choice.

For 1992, the results for models 1 and 2 are shown in Figure 6. When playing the role of a secondary decision criterion (model 1), the EU coefficient is $-.192$. As a screening mechanism, the EU played a bigger role in Scotland in 1992: the coefficient is $-.33$.

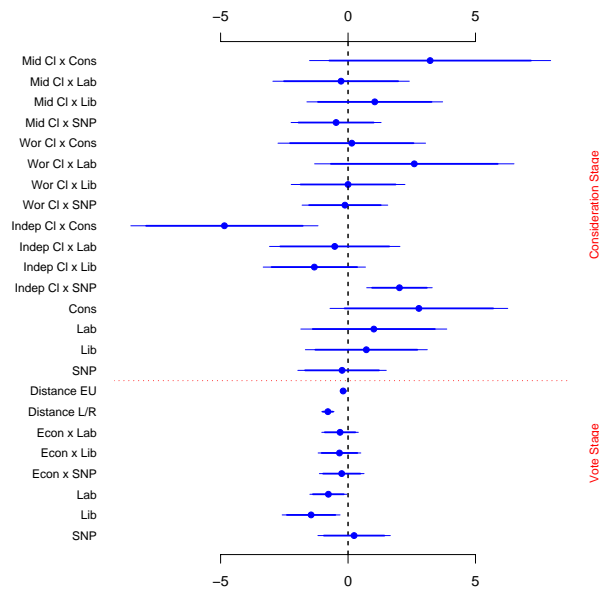
Table 3 considers the marginal partial effects due to EU issue voting for both models. In general, the effects of the EU are more pronounced for the model in which the EU serves as a screening mechanism (model 2) than for the model in which it serves as a secondary consideration (model 1). These effects were computed identically to England.

These results should be judged in light of the other predictors. Comparing the EU to left-right economic issues, its effect in model 1 is relatively minor: $-.192$ versus $-.791$. As a screening mechanism, too, the EU seems to have been less important in 1992, its coefficient of $-.33$ in model 2 being quite a bit smaller than the left-right coefficient of $-.868$ in model 3. Both of these screening mechanisms seem less relevant than the question of whether Scotland should be independent. Scotsmen favoring such independence were considerably more likely to include the SNP and less likely to include the Tories.

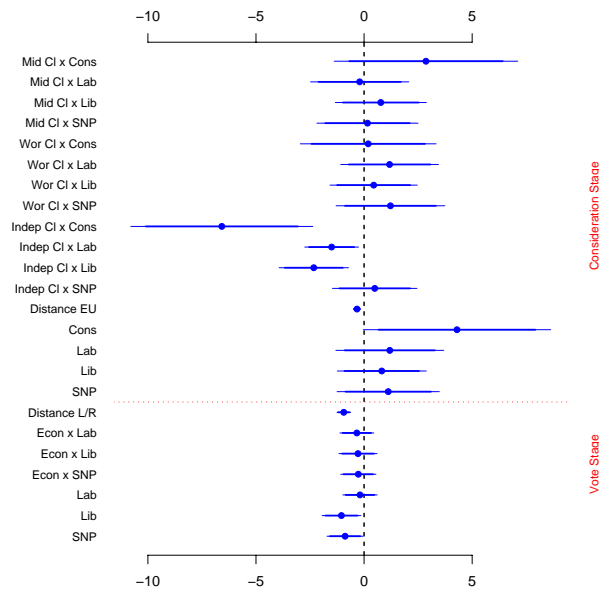
By 1997, something interesting had happened, which contrasts with the pattern observed in England. As a secondary decision criterion, the EU gained in importance (with a coefficient of $-.346$ in 1997 versus $-.192$ in 1992). As a screening rule, however, the issue lost importance, with the coefficient dropping from $-.33$ to $-.212$. Figure 7 shows the parameter estimates for 1997.

The change in EU issue voting had implications for the choice probabilities. As Table 4 reveals, the EU issue had relatively mild effects on vote probabilities when considered as a screening mechanism. Its effects as a secondary attribute seem to have been a bit stronger, however, especially when considering the electoral fortunes of Labour.

Figure 6: Posterior Estimates Scotland 1992

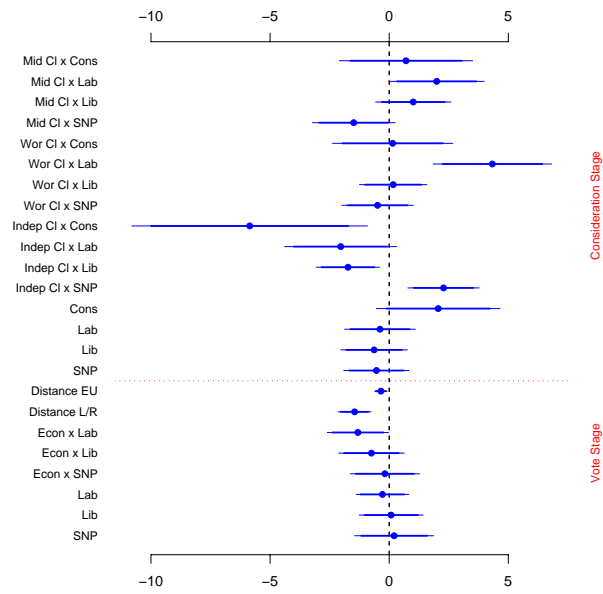


(a) Model 1

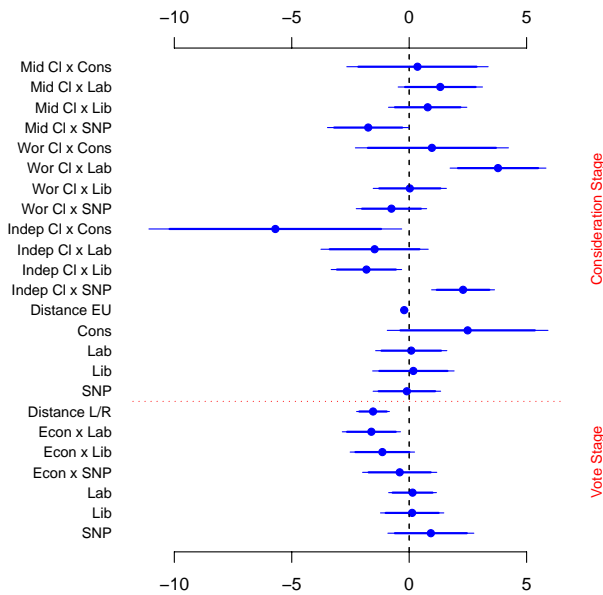


(b) Model 2

Figure 7: Posterior Estimates Scotland 1997



(a) Model 1



(b) Model 2

Table 4: Average Partial Effects of EU (Scotland 1997)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Scotland 97:	max	min	max	min
Conservatives	0.08	0.18	0.13	0.16
Labour	0.30	0.57	0.43	0.54
Liberal Dems	0.05	0.20	0.06	0.2
SNP	0.09	0.23	0.08	0.19

Again, the effect of EU issue voting should not be exaggerated. It seems to have been mild when compared to left-right ideology. The effect of this was almost five times larger in model 1 (-1.454). In Model 2, it was almost four times greater (model 3 coefficient of left-right economic ideology was -.750). As with the 1992 analysis, the impact of Scottish independence was particularly strong.

Discussion

We see clear evidence of the importance of the EU in the British case. While the EU was not without electoral consequences in 1992, in certain ways its impact had strengthened by 1997. In England, this strengthening occurred in the consideration stage, with English voters using party's EU stance to decide if that party was an acceptable alternative. In Scotland, the strengthening occurred in the choice stage. And the decreasing weight of the EU as a screening mechanism from 1992 to 1997, makes it more difficult to conclude that the EU had clearly evolved into a more important issue for Scottish voters by 1997.

The diverging patterns of issue evolution qua decision criteria in England and Scotland are unexpected. An obvious explanation is missing. As Figures 2 and 3 reveal, voter EU positions and their perceptions of the parties shifted analogously in England and Scotland. There is also no evidence of significantly different saliences of the EU in England and Scotland in 1997 (or, for that matter, 1992). While Scottish independence is a factor that played a role in Scotland and not England, it is not clear that this issue became much more decisive from 1992 to 1997 so as to change the impact of the EU.

More work will need to be done to ascertain why the issue evolution paths of England and Scotland diverged. Perhaps the unique nature of the 1997 elec-

tions played a role here. These elections returned Labour to power and may have had a unique dynamic that can account for the anomalous patterns in Scotland. In this regard, an analysis of the 2001 elections, when the Conservatives campaigned even more intensely on the EU issue, may be worthwhile.

Conclusions

Has the EU ceased to be a sleeping giant? That is, has it begun to influence electoral behavior? An affirmative answer to these questions would suggest that the issue has evolved in the sense of becoming a defining element of the political landscape.

A long literature on issue evolution has debated how issues cease to be sleeping giants. That literature has been silent, however, on the question of how new issues enter voters' decision processes. In this paper, we have developed a model that ties issue evolution directly to choice. We have argued that issues may come to affect electoral behavior in two different ways. Sometimes, issues are so explosive that they become criteria by which voters screen alternatives. They decide, based on the issue, whether a party alternative is acceptable or not. At other times, an issue's impact is less dramatic. Voters decide, based on other criteria, if alternatives are acceptable or not. In this way, they assemble a choice set of viable alternatives. The new issue then helps them to choose among those alternatives but no alternative is eliminated because of its stance on the new issue.

We also developed a statistical model that allows one to assess the decision path by which a new issue influences vote choice. The choice set logistic regression model distinguishes between a consideration and choice stage in decision making. The consideration stage is a screening stage, whereby unattractive alternatives are eliminated. The choice stage entails the selection of one alternative from within a subset of viable options.

Based on this statistical model, there is clear evidence that the EU issue ceased to sleep, at least in England when observing the period 1992-97. Whether it ceased to be a sleeping giant is less clear. While the EU gained in importance, the British elections in 1997 continued to be dominated by left-right economic issues. Thus, the giant is awakening but still has a lot of growing to do before dramatically altering electoral outcomes.

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